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1995

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Recommended Citation

Spira, H. (1995). Is the public ready to roast the meat industry?. *AWI Quarterly*, 44(4).

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Is the Public Ready to Roast the Meat Industry?

Henry Spira

For decades, the well-being of farm animals has been a largely ignored issue. So it may come as a surprise that most Americans want animals to be protected from cruelty. This is the overall finding of a recent telephone survey of 1,012 adults by the Opinion Research Corporation of Princeton, New Jersey, for Animal Rights International.

The survey found that 93% of US adults agreed that animal pain and suffering should be reduced as much as possible even though the animals are going to be slaughtered anyway.

Nine out of ten adult Americans also disapprove of current methods of raising food animals in spaces so confining that sows and calves can't even turn around and that laying hens are unable to stretch their wings.

With these concerns, it's hardly surprising that more than eight out of ten people think the meat and egg industries should be held legally responsible for protecting farm animals from cruelty.

And that 91% think the US Department of Agriculture should be involved in protecting farm animals from cruelty. What may well alarm corporate executives is that on top of this, 58% of the public also believes that fast food restaurants and supermarkets, who profit from factory intensive farming, should be held legally responsible for protecting farm animals from cruelty.

Too often, in the past, animal protectionists have ignored the 95% of animals who do not necessarily rank high in popularity. But, this study shows that the American public cares about all vulnerable animals. And, as demonstrated by the recent successful campaign to abolish the face branding of cattle, they are ready to confront and challenge abuses in animal agriculture.

As the public focuses on the horrors of factory farming, smart-thinking, image-conscious corporations, who profit from animal agriculture, would do well to respond swiftly and pro-actively. The alternative will almost certainly be a consumer backlash as animal protectionists begin to launch public awareness campaigns. In this connection, we have begun to use the survey to talk with major companies such as Campbell Soup, Heinz and PepsiCo about setting humane animal standards for themselves and their suppliers. This was the successful formula which energized Revlon and the whole cosmetics industry in the 1980s.

Pressures on the meat-industrial complex will continue to intensify from all directions. In addition to farm animal well-being issues, intensive confinement systems will be increasingly challenged on the grounds of public health, protecting the environment, feeding the starving millions and leaving some quality of life for future generations.

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